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July 21, 2004

Dear Mr. Schmitten:

Office of  
Habitat Conservation

I am writing about the petition that cites the damage that is being done to sensitive deep-sea coral and sponge habitat by bottom trawling. It was submitted on March 24 by Oceana that has rules that were submitted to cover this specific issue.

These rules identify, map and list all known areas containing high concentrations of deep-sea coral and sponge habitat.

They also designate all known areas containing high concentrations of deep-sea coral and sponge habitat both as "essential fish habitat" and "habitat areas of particular concern". These areas need to be closed to bottom trawling.

Areas not bottom trawled within the past three years need to be identified and closed to bottom trawling.

Bycatch in areas that are currently being bottom trawled need to be monitored and if bycatch totals indicate the presence of deep-sea corals and sponge habitat, they should be closed to bottom trawling until they can be mapped to see if there are corals or sponges there, and those areas should be protected if there are.

A program should be started to proactively identify new areas containing high concentrations of deep-sea coral and sponge habitat, and these areas should be closed to bottom trawling when found.

Monitoring coverage of areas where deep-sea coral and sponge habitat are likely to be found should be increased.

Enforcement and penalties for violations of areas closed to bottom trawling should be increased and reinforced.

There should also be fund research to identify, protect, and restore damaged deep-sea coral and sponge habitat.

This petition and its rules are of utmost importance to saving coral reefs, sponges, all ocean life and the oceans themselves. Please help to make this petition go into effect so that it can become law. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Toni Siegrist